

Why 'Star Wars' Gives People Meaning

This weekend, millions of *Star Wars* fans will pack theaters to see the latest installment of the series – *The Force Awakens*. Some will go for the experience; others purely for entertainment.

And some will be hoping—at least subconsciously—that the movie gives added meaning to their lives.

In saying that, I don't wish to be critical or dismissive of those who find greater meaning in *Star Wars*. Rather, I think the frenzy surrounding the series shows modern society's hunger for meaning. *Star Wars* provides an opportunity to at least temporarily sate that hunger.

Why? Honestly, I'm not quite sure, but my initial guess is that *Star Wars* possesses many of the characteristics that mark apocalyptic literature.

Historically, apocalyptic literature tends to be produced by oppressed and marginalized in times of political and cultural disarray. The literature offers readers a respite from their current situation through describing a future in which good eventually triumphs over evil. It "unveils" (which is what "apocalypse" means – an "unveiling") this future world to its readers, giving them a glimpse of their destiny and the hope necessary to endure their present struggles. It dramatizes readers' own existence, putting it in the context of a greater spiritual battle.

The *Star Wars* movies possess many of these same characteristics. I could certainly point out that the movies have all opened in the midst of "political and cultural disarray." The first films came out during a time that was still reeling from Vietnam and the Watergate scandal, and was

experiencing the Cold War, and *The Force Awakens* comes at a time when we live under the threat of terrorism, a potential world war, internal strife, and possibly another recession, among other things. But privileging these particular things seems a bit trite, as “political and cultural disarray” has become a fixture of modern life.

Like the traditional apocalyptic genre, *Star Wars* offers a clarity about who is good and who is evil – which is something that can be strangely comforting to people, especially in a more relativistic society in which these labels are largely considered passé. What is more, *Star Wars* offers consolation through portraying a good, outmatched minority conquering this evil.

In addition, *Star Wars* also gives a glimpse into a world radically different than the current one. Granted, this world is not quite the heavenly realm that one finds in past Jewish and Christian apocalyptic literature. It is rather the quasi-heavenly realm of a technologically-oriented society, but nevertheless, one in which spirituality (in the form of “The Force”) clearly permeates people’s lives. The opportunity to view such a world offers a break from the monotonous hum-drum of modern existence.

Do you think something such as *Star Wars* can be a catalyst to providing people with more meaning? Or, are they merely a distraction from “real life” good only for their entertainment value?

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